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Healthy Chocolate?

Many may not consider eating chocolate a healthy option, but could be surprised to learn that this delicious treat has many healing properties. Made from the seeds of the tree *Theobroma cocoa*, chocolate contains four times the amount of catechins (antioxidants) as tea, plus some other antioxidants, which protect against heart disease.

Chocolate is loaded with the mineral magnesium; often some women crave chocolate during the time leading up to their period when magnesium levels fall dramatically, which for some triggers a chemical imbalance that is the cause of mood swings and feeling irritable. There is evidence that suggests eating chocolate can override the body's chemical imbalance. But before you go rushing off to the store to stock up on chocolate bars, keep in mind that most of them are highly processed and contain little of chocolate's redeeming qualities; mostly containing sugar, saturated vegetable fat and powdered milk, which is why many argue that this is not proper chocolate. In other words, where chocolate is concerned, only the best high-quality ingredients will do. High-quality chocolate has the most magnesium; as well as being a source of potassium, manganese, vitamin A, calcium, phosphorous, with traces of zinc, copper and iron.

The Journal of the American Diet Association reports that chocolate is the food humans crave the most; forty per cent of women and fifteen per cent of men. Eating a chocolate bar when you're feeling low can noticeably lift your spirits because it stimulates serotonin and endorphin levels, the brain's natural happy and pain killing drugs. Chocolate contains a substance called phenyl ethylamine that raises the blood's glucose level, which, in turn, increases the amount of serotonin in the brain. Fat in chocolate boosts the level of endorphins.

The ancient Aztecs thought so highly of cocoa tree's bean that they used it as their currency; the tree was viewed as a source of wealth and strength, and associated it with their god Quetzalcoatl. They crushed the beans into a paste and made it into a refreshing drink that they believed imparted great wisdom, energy and made a potent aphrodisiac. The paste they made is called mole (mow-lay) and is still a main ingredient in many Mexican meat dishes today. It wasn't until Europeans brought the paste back in the 16th century that other sweet flavourings were added to it. Chocolate was sold for medicinal purposes in 18th century France, used to treat fevers, chest and stomach pains, as a cough mixture and also as an aid to gaining weight. During the 1800s bars of chocolate became popular after the invention of the moulding process, where cocoa was ground by machines then melted and poured into moulds. Daniel Peter, a Swiss manufacturer, perfected the process in 1875 by adding cow's milk to the liquor and cocoa butter to create milk chocolate, the most popular form of the treat today.

* This text was taken from: <http://www.naturalalternative.net>
<http://www.naturalalternative.net/natural-power-foods/chocolate.html>